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Review of United Nations cross-border operations

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction and methodology

1. In its resolution 2165 (2014), the Security Council authorized United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners to use routes across conflict lines and the border crossings at Bab al-Salam, Bab al-Hawa, Ya'rubiyah and Ramtha, in addition to the crossings already in use, in order to ensure that humanitarian assistance, including medical and surgical supplies, reached people in need throughout the Syrian Arab Republic by the most direct routes, with notification to the Syrian authorities, and to that end stressed the need for all border crossings to be used efficiently for United Nations humanitarian operations. The Council initially authorized the operations for 6 months, then extended the authorization for 12-month periods in resolutions 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016) and 2393 (2017). Most recently, the Council extended the operations until 10 January 2019.

2. Since the adoption of resolution 2165 (2014), the United Nations humanitarian response has included humanitarian assistance deliveries through three possible avenues: (a) assistance provided from within the Syrian Arab Republic to regularly accessible areas by United Nations agencies based in Damascus; (b) assistance provided from within the country, across conflict lines, by United Nations agencies based in Damascus; and (c) assistance provided by United Nations agencies, together with Syrian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as implementing partners, from across the country's borders to areas not controlled by the Government. All deliveries from within the country to regularly accessible areas and across conflict lines are carried out with the agreement of the Syrian authorities, from which the United Nations obtains facilitation letters for all deliveries. Cross-border deliveries are effected by United Nations agencies, together with implementing partners, and are notified to the Syrian authorities by the United Nations in order to confirm the humanitarian nature of those relief consignments; however, as they were authorized by resolution 2165 (2014) and subsequent resolutions, they do not require the agreement of the Syrian authorities.

3. The present review is submitted pursuant to paragraph 5 of Security Council resolution 2393 (2017), in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to conduct, within six months of the adoption of the resolution, an independent written review of United Nations humanitarian cross-border operations, including recommendations on how to further strengthen the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic, taking into account the views of relevant

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parties, including the Syrian authorities, the relevant neighbouring countries of the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners.

4. In line with that mandate, the present review is focused solely on the delivery of cross-border humanitarian assistance by the United Nations. Three key aspects of the response are highlighted in detail in the review: the technical functioning of the operations, with a specific focus on the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism; the impact of the operations on people in need in the country; and the accountability mechanisms in place for projects that are managed remotely.

5. While NGOs carry out significant relief operations, in particular as relates to service provision, the present report does not cover their cross-border operations or deliveries. The information contained herein is based on data available from a wide variety of sources. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was provided with detailed written input by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The Office conducted extensive consultations with all relevant actors in Amman, Ankara, Baghdad, Damascus and Gaziantep (Turkey). All interlocutors were provided with specific questions before the interviews (see annex). Particular efforts were made to take into account the views of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as those of the Governments of Iraq, Jordan and Turkey, from where the United Nations cross-border operations are carried out. Consultations were held with the full range of humanitarian coordination forums and actors involved in United Nations cross-border operations, including the Strategic Steering Group, the Humanitarian Liaison Group and the Cross-Border Task Force, and, at the intersectoral level, with specific sectors, individual agencies and NGOs, both Syrian and international. Meetings were also held with donors to humanitarian operations through the regular channels in place for briefing Member States in Jordan and Turkey. A thorough desk review was also carried out to compile existing information on United Nations cross-border operations since 2014.

II. Technical operations

6. The delivery of United Nations cross-border assistance is based on the Organization's assessments of needs and is also coordinated with all relevant partners. It is preceded by a notification to the Syrian authorities and implemented in cooperation with a range of agencies' implementing partners, officials of neighbouring countries and the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism. Overall, the success of delivery depends upon a coordinated response by humanitarian actors throughout the Syrian Arab Republic.

7. As with any aid delivery from within the Syrian Arab Republic, assistance provided across borders pursuant to resolution 2165 (2014) and subsequent resolutions renewing the relevant decisions therein is rooted in humanitarian principles and based on independent assessments of need by the Organization. All United Nations programming is conducted in response to needs identified in the annual humanitarian needs overview. The overview prepared for the Syrian Arab Republic is one of the more robust multisectoral needs assessments in any humanitarian operation around the globe. For the most recent overview, prepared in 2017, 31 humanitarian partners conducted assessments in 5,154 communities, with 98 per cent carried out in the form of face-to-face interviews with 140,000 Syrians, to assess needs across multiple sectors.

8. All United Nations agencies and most, but not all, NGOs working across borders participate in the relevant humanitarian coordination structures and operate under the humanitarian response plan. In addition, significant non-humanitarian operations, such as support for local councils, are under way in cross-border areas. Those operations do not fall under the humanitarian coordination umbrella, but their activities have an impact on certain aspects of United Nations humanitarian assistance.

9. Needs assessments are updated at least twice a year, and efforts are made to review needs quarterly. Such regular and detailed assessments are now particularly critical because the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic is evolving rapidly. Mass internal displacement has stretched the response, with an estimated 2.8 million people displaced in 2017 and over 920,000 displaced in the first four months of 2018, many to areas reachable only by cross-border operations. It has also shown that independent needs assessments remain as critical as ever to ensuring transparency, effectiveness and accountability.

10. Based on the overall assessments, individual cross-border shipments are initiated by United Nations agencies in coordination with humanitarian partners, such as food security or health clusters. Each agency submits a shipment plan to the logistics cluster, which then submits a compilation of all agency requests to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 72 hours prior to the expected departure time of the consignment. The Office uses the information provided to send the first notification of the intended shipment to the Syrian authorities. That notification provides information on expected crossing dates, the border crossing to be used, a description of the humanitarian goods to be delivered, the number of trucks, the United Nations owner and the destination (district). The Deputy Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (for the cross-border operation based in Turkey) or the Humanitarian Coordinator (for Jordan or Iraq) passes the information on to the Syrian authorities in the form of a note verbale relayed by the Humanitarian Coordinator in the Syrian Arab Republic 48 hours prior to the departure of the convoy. Any changes in the consignments are communicated using the same process.

11. On the day of a delivery, trucks from the originating country travel to the border, where aid is monitored and transferred to Syrian trucks for delivery in the Syrian Arab Republic. In the operation based in Turkey, the facility where aid is transferred between trucks is located inside Turkey, in Jordan the location is in the border zone, and in Iraq the trucks meet at the zero point and remain on their respective sides. In all countries, the logistics cluster managed by WFP coordinates most aspects of the trans-shipment process, hiring security guards (as needed) and labour to load the Syrian trucks, liaising with customs agencies and ensuring information-sharing and coordination among the United Nations agencies, the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism, the Department of Safety and Security and implementing partners.

12. In Turkey, Syrian trucks, once loaded with humanitarian items and confirmed by the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism (see sect. III below), are accompanied by the Turkish authorities and members of the logistics cluster and Mechanism from the trans-shipment area to the border crossing point.

13. In Jordan, IOM manages the fleet of Syrian trucks that carry assistance. Unlike the trucks that transport assistance from Turkey and Iraq, the fleet managed by IOM is based in Jordan and crosses into the Syrian Arab Republic only to make humanitarian deliveries, after which it returns to Jordan the same day. To be able to complete those deliveries, the trucks must be loaded the night before, after which they are sealed by both the United Nations and customs officials. The Jordanian authorities escort all movements in the border area until the vehicles cross into the Syrian Arab Republic.

14. In Iraq, where only two cross-border movements have been conducted, procedures may evolve further as the border crossing point is rehabilitated.

15. At the Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam border crossings with Turkey, as well as in Ramtha (at the border with Jordan), there are scanners that examine each truck to provide a detailed view of its contents. A scanner will soon be installed in Ya'rubiyah, at the border with Iraq. In Bab al-Hawa and Ramtha, all Syrian trucks are scanned by the authorities before entering the border area from the Syrian Arab Republic. In Bab al-Salam, Syrian trucks entering Turkey are scanned at random. For additional security, the authorities may also use canine units (as is the case in Jordan), metal detectors and physical scans before trucks are allowed to cross the border from the Syrian Arab Republic.

16. Once across the border, the Syrian trucks deliver aid to the warehouse of the implementing partner in the area, as notified to the Syrian authorities. The assistance is then delivered and distributed to beneficiaries or provided to support essential services, as outlined in the humanitarian response plan. In some cases, the aid is pre-positioned to ensure that assistance can be maintained in the event of a temporary suspension of cross-border activity. That was the case, for example, in Bab al-Hawa and Bab al-Salam during increased hostilities in late January 2018, when shelling from the Syrian Arab Republic into the border areas caused the United Nations to halt operations for 10 days (21–31 January), as well as in Ramtha in the middle of 2016, following an attack on a Jordanian border point that resulted in the entire border area being declared a military zone and cross-border operations being halted for five weeks.

17. The following measures are recommended:

(a) Continue regular, high-quality independent assessments of need to ensure that assistance is based on needs and delivered in accordance with humanitarian principles and that funds are raised in line with needs;

(b) Increase coordination with actors not operating under the humanitarian response plan to further improve the quality of the response;

(c) As the Ya'rubiyah border crossing becomes fully operational, share good practices from other border crossing points to ensure the smooth functioning of operations there.

III. United Nations Monitoring Mechanism

18. The United Nations Monitoring Mechanism has 41 staff members and an annual budget of $3.5 million. Its mandate, as set out in Security Council resolution 2165 (2014), is to monitor, with the consent of the relevant neighbouring countries of the Syrian Arab Republic, the loading of all humanitarian relief consignments of the United Nations humanitarian agencies and their implementing partners at the relevant United Nations facilities, and any subsequent opening of the consignments by the customs authorities of the relevant neighbouring countries, for passage into the Syrian Arab Republic through the border crossings of Bab al-Salam, Bab al-Hawa, Ya'rubiyah and Ramtha, with notification by the United Nations to the Syrian authorities, in order to confirm the humanitarian nature of those consignments.

19. That mandate is made operational through teams working at each of the border crossing points, under a single set of procedures to ensure consistency of operations across hubs. The Mechanism works exclusively in the territory of the relevant neighbouring countries of the Syrian Arab Republic, namely, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey. Its mandate does not include monitoring the delivery of assistance within the Syrian

Arab Republic. United Nations agencies and their implementing partners bear full responsibility for the consignments and their contents within the country.

20. For each of the four border crossings named in resolution 2165 (2014), a monitoring team, including a team leader, monitoring officers and support personnel, is assigned to the operation. To help to ensure that its work is perceived as independent and unbiased, the Mechanism ensures that its staff members are diverse in terms of nationality. In 2017, its international staff came from 17 countries. The humanitarian nature of relief consignments is confirmed on the basis of the following criteria:

(a) The consignment owner must be a United Nations humanitarian agency or an implementing partner;

(b) The consignment must be related to a humanitarian relief activity;

(c) The consignment must not have been manipulated by a third party.

21. The criteria are monitored against positive and negative indicators that are set out in the guidelines for the Mechanism. The monitoring team checks the consignment visually and physically, which includes performing random verifications of humanitarian items. Where applicable, technology (e.g., metal detectors) is used. In the case of a mismatch against the load list or doubt as to the contents of the packages, the team may request an interruption of the loading process pending clarification by the consignment owner. To date, it has not been necessary to request such an interruption.

22. Monitoring teams accompany the customs authorities while they check the consignments. When loading is completed, the team in Jordan monitors the closure of each consignment, together with customs officials. In cases where the receiving trucks remain in the trans-shipment hub overnight after loading (as is the case in Jordan), the monitoring team applies seals and tamper-evident tape to the trucks. The team then checks the seals on the day of the convoy's departure as a safeguard against any manipulation by third parties overnight.

23. When monitored trucks cross into the Syrian Arab Republic, the monitoring team immediately notifies the Chief of the Mechanism, confirming the humanitarian nature of the consignment. On that basis, the Chief then issues a notification to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, confirming that the shipment is humanitarian in nature, through a note verbale sent by the Humanitarian Coordinator in the country. Upon the completion of the operation, the teams archive all monitoring forms as scanned copies in Iraq and Jordan and as hard copies in Turkey.

24. The following measures are recommended:

(a) Ensure continuity of the mandate of the Mechanism — as an independent and trusted body — to allow and facilitate humanitarian deliveries to the Syrian Arab Republic;

(b) Share knowledge with other operations with a monitoring mandate to provide an opportunity to compare best practices.

IV. Impact of United Nations cross-border operations

25. As at May 2018, an estimated 4.88 million people were in need in areas where a significant number continued to be more accessible from across the border than from within the Syrian Arab Republic: 2.67 million of them are in areas to which only United Nations cross-border actors have access, comprising 2.21 million in the north-west and 460,000 in the south. Thanks to United Nations cross-border support, there

have been only few reports of malnutrition, with hundreds of thousands of children screened regularly. Schools are operational and equipped with basic materials provided by the Organization. Supported by United Nations medical supplies, 82 hospitals and 70 mobile clinics are operational, providing critical assistance to those in need.

26. The humanitarian impact of the Organization's cross-border operations is significant, with the areas reached by cross-border deliveries benefiting from regular and sustained assistance. From July 2014 to April 2018, millions of people received humanitarian assistance, many on a monthly basis. A total of 3.7 million people received food assistance; 4.7 million people received water sanitation and hygiene assistance; education supplies were delivered to 946,000 people; and nutrition assistance was provided for 611,000 people. In addition, some 21.1 million medical procedures were conducted. The table provides additional details on total humanitarian deliveries, disaggregated by border crossing point, since 2014.

Total cross-border deliveries, July 2014–April 2018

Country	*Border crossing*	*Consignments*	*Truckloads*
Turkey	Bab al-Hawa	346	13 682
Turkey	Bab al-Salam	194	2 054
Jordan	Ramtha	259	4 480
Iraq	Ya'rubiyah	2	22
Total		**801**	**20 238**

27. In its resolution 2393 (2017), adopted in December 2017, the Security Council noted the impact of the cross-border operations, recalling that the United Nations and its implementing partners continued to deliver life-saving assistance to millions of people in need in the Syrian Arab Republic through humanitarian aid delivered across borders, including food assistance for an average of 1 million people every month since 2016; non-food items for 4 million people; health assistance for 15 million treatments, and water and sanitation supplies for over 3 million people.

28. In 2017, United Nations humanitarian cross-border deliveries represented about 20 per cent of overall humanitarian cross-border deliveries to the Syrian Arab Republic, while NGOs accounted for the remainder. Humanitarian assistance by NGOs is mostly provided through commercial channels, or through a separate monitoring mechanism run by the Turkish Red Crescent Society at 12 crossing points at the border with Turkey. Two border crossings from Turkey are open for commercial access, namely, Bab al-Salam and Bab al-Hawa, the same two crossings authorized by the Security Council for cross-border operations. In addition to being monitored, the shipment process through the Mechanism and the Turkish Red Crescent Society offers the advantage of being able to expedite shipments during emergencies and is therefore able to respond to immediate needs for life-saving assistance. Using the commercial channel also provides NGOs with a predictable shipment schedule for their ongoing humanitarian programmes, along with a well-established customs mechanism.

29. In 2018, United Nations deliveries have provided assistance for one third of the people in need in the north-western and southern parts of the Syrian Arab Republic each month. Those people do not have access to assistance from within the country. The full and complementary use of all delivery options, both from within the country and from neighbouring countries, is necessary in order to gain access to people in need and to ensure that assistance and services are provided to all of them. In making

full use of the various avenues for access, whether across borders, across conflict lines or to regularly accessible areas, efforts were made to ensure that humanitarian assistance was sustained, coordinated and complementary.

30. In the first four months of 2018, food for an average of 887,000 people was delivered each month. This represents an increase of 12 per cent from the average of 793,000 people reached over the same period in 2017. Of those reached in 2017, some 253,000 received United Nations food assistance in the southern part of the Syrian Arab Republic, while approximately 634,000 people were provided with food in the north-west. In addition, health treatments and other assistance, including shelter, non-food items, education and water and sanitation support are provided to hundreds of thousands of people every month.

31. In the monthly report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015), 2332 (2016), 2393 (2017) and 2401 (2018), a breakdown of targeted beneficiaries by sector has been provided at the district level since January 2018. That additional level of detail is provided in accordance with resolution 2393 (2017), which calls for more detailed information on humanitarian assistance delivered through United Nations cross-border operations.

32. For many people in need in the south and in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic, cross-border operations remain essential to gaining access to meaningful and predictable humanitarian assistance and essential services. For the United Nations and its partners based in the Syrian Arab Republic, access from Damascus to hard-to-reach areas has been curtailed considerably. More generally, United Nations inter-agency convoys from within the Syrian Arab Republic to hard-to-reach and besieged areas have been severely limited over the past 18 months owing to a lack of security and bureaucratic delays by the Government. Medical and other life-saving items continue to be systematically removed from inter-agency convoys deployed from within the country, with over 600,000 medical items removed in 2017. United Nations cross-border operations play a critical role in ensuring not only that assistance reaches those most in need by the most direct route, but also that the types of assistance and humanitarian items delivered are those that are most needed.

33. Although reporting is focused on the delivery of goods by truck, the impact of the United Nations cross-border response is broader, in particular its support for the functioning of public services, which itself is not a focus of the present review. An important element of the cross-border humanitarian operations conducted by NGOs is their provision of services in areas where regular public services, such as schools or hospitals, are not operational. While the United Nations is not directly involved in such services provided by NGOs, its cross-border assistance, including school supplies and medicine, is essential for the NGOs to provide their services. Thanks to the combination and complementarity of goods provided by the Organization and services provided by NGOs, millions have received life-saving services.

34. United Nations cross-border operations facilitate specialized services, including in the areas of protection of civilians, reproductive health and gender-based violence responses, that benefit the most vulnerable people in the Syrian Arab Republic. Those services would be especially difficult to provide from within the country, where the same level of access might not be sustained. In addition, many of the partners interviewed noted the importance of the trust that had been built between communities and cross-border humanitarian actors over the years, which had created the space to address important issues, such as gender-based violence.

35. The partners interviewed highlighted how United Nations cross-border operations had resulted in more coordinated, efficient and principled humanitarian action. They underlined that the Organization's engagement had strengthened the

sharing of information among humanitarian actors and had helped humanitarian organizations to focus their efforts on the most vulnerable people. Preparedness planning was noted as a particularly important achievement. Partners also stressed the importance of the United Nations in promoting humanitarian principles and developing and disseminating standards and guidelines applying to all humanitarian actors.

36. Another important aspect of the United Nations engagement in cross-border assistance that was highlighted by almost all interlocutors was the importance of capacity-building programmes facilitated by the Organization for Syrian NGOs operating as cross-border implementing partners. One of the largest gaps identified in the review was a lack of trained service providers, such as doctors. Training opportunities have, at times, been limited by the number of Syrian staff who can cross the border to Jordan or Turkey; some agencies have stated that the processes for allowing Syrians to receive the relevant training in those countries could be further streamlined. In Turkey, five humanitarian staff members per organization are given special permission to cross the border from the Syrian Arab Republic each month. The Jordanian authorities have also noted the importance of training Syrian NGOs and have offered to increase, on a case-by-case basis, the number of staff who are authorized to cross the border.

37. The following measures are recommended:

(a) Continue to develop guidance on the provision of assistance and services to ensure effective coordination and coherence in the humanitarian response;

(b) Expand capacity-building efforts for implementing partners to improve the effectiveness of the humanitarian response and to ensure adherence to humanitarian principles and standards.

V. Monitoring assistance delivery

38. While the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism confirms the humanitarian nature of relief consignments, additional layers of monitoring are carried out inside the Syrian Arab Republic. End-use monitoring is a standard practice in humanitarian operations, where the users of the assistance provide feedback on its impact. The United Nations, however, applies higher standards to cross-border assistance transported into the Syrian Arab Republic. This difference is due to several factors, including the fact that the Organization's cross-border operations are managed remotely by the United Nations and its partners and that they are thus unable to visit the distribution or service delivery sites. Remotely managed humanitarian responses are not unique to the Syrian Arab Republic and have been undertaken at other locations around the world where insecurity limits movement. While such operations, by nature, cannot verify end use with absolute certainty, the United Nations and its implementing partners are well versed in ensuring that assistance reaches those for whom it is intended. The Syrian context exhibits a high degree of innovation in addressing potential shortcomings.

39. Monitoring is first performed by the implementing partner, whose responsibility as project manager requires due diligence to ensure a high-quality response. The implementing partners for cross-border operations in the Syrian Arab Republic are in contact with United Nations agencies and with donors almost on a daily basis. Examples of innovation by implementing partners to ensure accountability to agencies and donors include geotagging and time-stamping photographs, and in some cases providing real-time video streams of distribution points to enable direct monitoring.

40. Implementing partners also maintain beneficiary lists that indicate who is to receive the assistance. The lists are based on independent assessments of needs, including vulnerability criteria. Implementing partners use the lists at distribution points and collect the signatures or thumbprints of the beneficiaries when the service and assistance is provided. In some instances, biometric data are used to confirm the identity of beneficiaries. WFP, the largest United Nations cross-border actor, has implemented an advanced beneficiary and management system that makes it possible to prioritize assistance geographically using selection criteria at the household level, including vulnerability factors such as the number of children and older persons in the family, the gender of the head of the household, household income, disabilities among family members and general living conditions, including displacement status and type of accommodation. In 2018, WFP implemented the system to register and assist beneficiaries reached through livelihood support and is now beginning to roll out household verification tools for general food assistance beneficiaries in the south of the Syrian Arab Republic.

41. The implementing partners are organizations that have been vetted by the United Nations and engage regularly and closely with their respective contracting United Nations agencies. Before contracting, assessments are conducted to review the partners' qualifications, including to review their financial audits, their capacity to perform and their adherence to humanitarian principles. Once an implementing partner is selected, its operations are monitored regularly. Implementing partners coordinate with the relevant humanitarian cluster coordination leads and provide monthly updates on their activities to the relevant United Nations agency.

42. The United Nations and donors also use third parties to monitor distribution and services provided by implementing partners. The role of those monitors is to observe the distribution of assistance directly to beneficiaries, to assess distributions at the facility level for items that might be provided to schools, health facilities or child-friendly spaces, to monitor service provision and to audit records as necessary. Third-party monitors contracted by IOM also visit the warehouses maintained by humanitarian partners to confirm the humanitarian nature of the supplies therein and to monitor their distribution.

43. WFP reported that third-party monitoring activities were further strengthened in 2017, with an 8 per cent increase in the number of visits to final distribution points compared with 2016 across all of its operations (i.e., from within the Syrian Arab Republic and across borders). In 2018, the WFP monitoring mechanism was again enhanced for cross-border operations from Jordan, with the allocation of additional third-party monitors and higher percentages of monitoring compared with other parts of the Syrian Arab Republic. WHO reported that qualitative and quantitative third-party monitoring of the supply chain was launched for deliveries of medical items from Turkey in May 2018, with a view to monitoring the supply line from the cross-border hub to the warehouses and on to the receiving health structures.

44. Another layer of monitoring is the cross-checking of information from the field gathered after distribution. Such post-distribution monitoring takes various forms, but one of the most common is beneficiary interviews. Both third parties and implementing partners conduct exit interviews with randomly selected beneficiaries at distribution points to verify the quantity and quality of items received and to elicit their perspectives on the distribution process. In addition, assistance is labelled with contact details so that beneficiaries can contact implementing partners through call centres or use messaging technologies to provide feedback on the aid received. WFP is finalizing plans to use those tools to launch a direct complaint and feedback mechanism that will allow that organization to ensure enhanced accountability and interaction with beneficiaries. Furthermore, feedback from field meetings between implementing partners and beneficiaries, regular reports to humanitarian clusters and

information provided by local authorities at various levels are received regularly. In addition, IOM relies on outcome mapping to track not only the delivery of assistance, but also its impact.

45. In addition to the primary layers of monitoring described above, the cluster system used to coordinate the delivery of assistance provides another layer of accountability, which helps to ensure adherence to humanitarian principles by partners through capacity-building and by defining and implementing system-wide protocols and policies. In addition, Governments hosting cross-border operations provide an added layer of transparency, as they monitor the shipments from and into their territories closely and request accountability and thorough explanations for any deviations from planned operations.

46. The United Nations strives to ensure that there are no irregularities, and there is zero tolerance for the diversion of assistance from intended beneficiaries. Owing to the high-risk environment, it is critical that systems be in place to prevent aid diversion. If the humanitarian community is not able to provide assistance and services in accordance with humanitarian principles, the broader humanitarian operation may be placed at risk, as donors would be less likely to provide support. If it cannot be ensured that assistance reaches the intended beneficiaries, it might be necessary to scale back humanitarian operations significantly or to stop the assistance altogether. As a result, the United Nations has taken preventive actions to reduce the likelihood of aid diversion. Those actions include the development of guidelines for implementing partners and active engagement with non-State armed opposition groups to promote respect for humanitarian principles and the integrity of humanitarian assistance. They also include developing a clear understanding of the nature of the impediments faced. The Organization is also working with implementing partners to ensure that they understand that humanitarian assistance should not be delivered to persons for whom it is not intended and that they have systems in place for identifying, reporting and tackling any cases of delivery of humanitarian assistance to persons for whom it is not intended, should they occur. One example of a preventive measure was the open letter addressed to non-State armed opposition groups in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic, which outlined the actions taken by those groups and stressed that impediments to humanitarian operations were not acceptable. The letter provided a uniform view of such impediments and the risk that armed groups faced if barriers to access to populations in need persisted.

47. Despite such prevention efforts, and as in many locations where the United Nations provides humanitarian assistance around the globe, including from within the Syrian Arab Republic, irregularities in aid deliveries have sometimes been identified in United Nations cross-border operations. Such irregularities have included instances of small-scale diversion, where local authorities or non-State armed opposition groups have been found appropriating aid from intended beneficiaries for their own use. The Organization has not identified any cases of large-scale or systemic diversion of its cross-border assistance in the Syrian Arab Republic.

48. When irregularities are reported, it is critical to ensure full transparency and reporting to the United Nations and to donors. That level of transparency allows the United Nations to take appropriate measures to recover aid and/or to amend procedures to ensure that irregularities do not recur. In a recent example of a transparent response to an irregularity, in April 2018, a convoy from the Ramtha border crossing point to the southern Syrian Arab Republic was delayed in its return, raising concerns of misconduct. Following a thorough review, including with implementing partners and local councils, it was determined that the delay arose because the receiving warehouse was not prepared to receive the convoy, resulting in slower-than-usual offloading. The details regarding the event were compiled and shared with all relevant parties, and the recommended steps were taken to ensure that

the partners at the warehouse were better prepared, thus reducing the likelihood that such delays would occur in the future.

49. While accountability mechanisms are in place, a certain degree of risk is inherent in day-to-day humanitarian operations, whether in Afghanistan, Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic or Yemen. Risks are constantly assessed, and some may be deemed inevitable in humanitarian operations. The level of scrutiny of United Nations cross-border operations in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the level of accountability mechanisms in place, is comparable to or higher than that found in many other humanitarian operations that operate in insecure environments around the world, including deliveries from within the Syrian Arab Republic.

50. The following measures are recommended:

(a) Taken together, the mechanisms in place provide significant checks against issues that might arise; however, those mechanisms come at a significant cost in terms of financial and human resources. Donors must be willing to continue to cover the expenses involved;

(b) As currently planned, beneficiary and management tools such as the system developed by WFP should be utilized more broadly in all areas where it is practicable and feasible.

VI. Views of the Syrian authorities and of neighbouring countries hosting cross-border operations

51. In its resolution 2393 (2017), the Security Council requested that the views of the Syrian authorities and those of relevant neighbouring countries be taken into account in the review of cross-border humanitarian operations. Using a single set of key questions developed for the discussions, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs held meetings with government representatives in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as in Iraq, Jordan and Turkey.

52. The representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of the Syrian Arab Republic stressed that Security Council resolution 2165 (2014) was an attempt to fuel the crisis in the country and to destabilize the situation further, weakening the Government through the use of politicized humanitarian assistance. The impact of cross-border deliveries on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country was also highlighted as a major issue of concern. The Government has, however, accepted the resolution, participating in the discussions on the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism to ensure its neutrality and impartiality and stipulating that staff members would need to come from countries perceived by the Government to be neutral. The representatives expressed their view that the Mechanism team was not neutral or able to ensure the humanitarian nature of trucks crossing the border. They stressed that "no one knew" where the contents of trucks went after they crossed the border. In the Government's view, the aid was not going to civilians but to terrorist groups. The representatives also stressed that there was no merit to cross-border deliveries, as all areas could be reached from Damascus if gaps in trust were addressed.

53. Representatives at the national operations centre in Iraq stressed that the Government of Iraq acknowledged the "principles of national sovereignty" and supported the "humanitarian principles that underpin the assistance being provided to people in need in the Syrian Arab Republic". They noted that the Iraqi authorities had worked collaboratively with the United Nations in opening the Ya'rubiyah border crossing to accommodate a pilot convoy for United Nations agencies and that they had also facilitated a second convoy. They called for the provision of security

equipment at the border crossing point to ensure maximum protection for convoys and individuals at the border. They also acknowledged the need for "continued dialogue" with the United Nations on cross-border operations at the appropriate levels.

54. In Jordan, the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted the country's long history as a leader in support of United Nations cross-border operations, initially as a pen holder for Security Council resolution 2165 (2014). He expressed his "strong support" for the work of the United Nations. He also emphasized the importance of strong teamwork between the relevant ministries in Jordan and the Organization, highlighting the benefits of information-sharing and engagement. Movements of people in need towards the Jordanian border were raised as an area of concern. He noted the "regularity" of the humanitarian deliveries, stressing that up to that point all deliveries had been humanitarian in nature. He also noted the role of training to strengthen implementing partners and highlighted that those efforts could be improved further with additional United Nations training activities in Jordan.

55. In Turkey, the representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that United Nations cross-border deliveries were "vital for people in need in the Syrian Arab Republic", noting that certain areas were not otherwise accessible. He added that support for the operations rested on the "realities on the ground" in the country, which were marked by the humanitarian needs of people close to the borders who could not be reached with humanitarian assistance from within the country, and by "the need to uphold international humanitarian law and humanity". He expressed a preference for full assistance provided from within the Syrian Arab Republic, but noted that it was not currently possible. The potential movement of populations to border areas was raised as a concern, as were the implications that such movements could have for the people displaced and for regional security. He praised the engagement with the United Nations in the implementation of the mandate, calling it the "most legitimate tool" and stressing that the operations had the full support of the Government of Turkey. He also noted the important role of the United Nations review of cross-border operations, primarily in addressing misconceptions about the operations.

VII. Observations

56. United Nations humanitarian cross-border deliveries are the result of an operation that hinges on a range of actors across the United Nations system, as well as on implementing partners, working together in a complex and insecure environment and under a high degree of scrutiny. The aim of the present review was to shed additional light on the processes in place, to highlight innovations that have been introduced to ensure an accountable, effective and transparent operation, and to provide recommendations for further improvements that will ensure more effective operations in the future. The focus of the review was to ensure that people in need received the most effective humanitarian response possible in such a difficult environment.

57. In the second half of 2017, I reported on multiple occasions that United Nations cross-border deliveries were critical and should continue. The recommendations provided herein can further strengthen the Organization's cross-border operations, which is important, as the Organization and its implementing partners must be able to gain access to populations in need rapidly, sustainably and without impediment, based on United Nations assessments of need. Cross-border aid deliveries meet those criteria. The complementarity of all methods of delivery has proved essential to

ensuring that those in need receive life-saving assistance; all approaches to reach those in need remain critical.

58. The year 2018 has seen a rapid evolution of the conflict, including shifts in control of territory and mass movements of people, with over 900,000 people already displaced by the end of April. While the geographical space for cross-border operations has shrunk as areas in the south-east of Idlib have come under the control of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, the size of the population being supported by United Nations cross-border operations has not decreased, and the needs of the people have become ever more acute.

59. The Security Council resolution authorizing United Nations cross-border humanitarian operations was adopted out of dire humanitarian need, with a significant number of people in need of assistance who were inaccessible from within the Syrian Arab Republic. Since 2014, those operations have provided sustained life-saving assistance to millions of people and continue to do so today. While all parties work towards a lasting political solution to end the suffering of the Syrian people, it is important to ensure that basic humanitarian assistance continues to reach people in need throughout the Syrian Arab Republic, regardless of where they live and based solely on needs.

Annex

Questions provided in advance of consultations

Table 1
Questions for humanitarian partners

Review criterion	*Questions*
Humanitarian impact	• Overarching question: To what extent have the United Nations cross-border operations implemented under the framework of Security Council resolution 2165 (2014) saved lives and reduced suffering since the adoption of that resolution?
	• What key metrics should be considered when analysing the humanitarian impact of United Nations cross-border operations?
	• What determining factors are considered by organizations when deciding to deliver assistance through United Nations cross-border assistance modalities in the Syrian Arab Republic? What alternatives are available?
	• To what extent have cross-border operations been able to address needs, in particular acute needs?
	• To what extent have United Nations cross-border operations adhered to humanitarian principles and programming quality standards, including with regard to accountability to affected people and gender considerations?
Practical functioning	• Overarching question: To what extent have United Nations cross-border operations functioned efficiently?
	• Who are the key stakeholders in United Nations cross-border operations and what are their responsibilities?
	• How have United Nations cross-border operations been coordinated? To what extent has the coordination included key stakeholders while ensuring concrete humanitarian outcomes?
	• What have the key challenges (e.g., logistical, capacity, access and security) been?
	• How have United Nations cross-border operations complemented the assistance being provided through other modalities?
	• What opportunities are available to further enhance coordination and/or more effectively and collectively address identified challenges?
Monitoring	• Overarching question: How well do United Nations cross-border operations ensure the accountability of humanitarian action to all stakeholders?
	• How does the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism for the Syrian Arab Republic function and how has it evolved since 2014?
	• What monitoring mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that aid provided through United Nations cross-border operations reaches its intended recipients and is delivered in a principled manner? To what extent are those safeguards effective?
	• How could monitoring be further improved?

Table 2
Questions for Syrian authorities and neighbouring countries of the Syrian Arab Republic hosting cross-border operations

Review criterion	*Questions*
Humanitarian impact	• Overarching question: How do you assess the overall impact of the United Nations cross-border mechanism?
	• What are your recommendations to further improve the humanitarian impact of United Nations cross-border operations?
Practical functioning	• Overarching question: What is your assessment of current United Nations cross-border delivery operations, including the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism?
	• What are your recommendations for strengthening United Nations cross-border operations, including the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism?
	• Is the information provided to the Security Council on a monthly basis sufficient, or could it be made more relevant?
Monitoring	• Overarching question: How would you assess the level of transparency of the United Nations cross-border operation?
	• How can the United Nations Monitoring Mechanism be more efficient in terms of logistics, timeliness and costs and in its work with host Governments?
	• How can the monitoring of and reporting on the end use of United Nations cross-border assistance be strengthened?